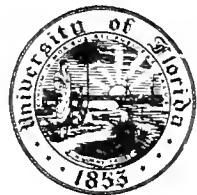


*a great curtain  
falls.*

792.0973  
A875g

UNIVERSITY  
OF FLORIDA  
LIBRARIES









Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2011 with funding from  
LYRASIS Members and Sloan Foundation

<http://www.archive.org/details/greatcurtainfall00atki>





# —a great curtain falls

## The First Programme NEW NATIONAL THEATRE

**Maywood, Howthorn & Pratt**  
Lessers and Manager  
(Also of the Chestnut Street Theatre, Pa.)  
**D. G. Pratt** Business Manager  
Engagement of the London and Edinburgh Dramatic Company.

This Evening, December 7, 1835, will be presented the Following Prologue, and Prize Address by Mrs. Hughes & Neckens'

Celebrated Comedy of  
**THE MAN OF THE WORLD**  
Sir Pertinax Maesycophant Mr. Maywood  
Egerton ..... Mr. Clin' (From London & Philadelphia Theatres)  
Lord Lumbercourt Mr. Jefferson  
Lidney ..... Mr. Senior  
(His first appearance here)  
Melville ..... Mr. Taylor  
(His first appearance here)  
Counsellor Plausible Mr. Eberle  
(From the Chestnut Street Then.)  
Sergeant Eithside Mr. Knight  
Sam, ..... Mr. Thompson  
(First appearance here)  
John ..... Mr. Caldwell  
Tompkins Mr. Weston  
(First appearance here)  
Lady Rodolpha Lumbercourt Mrs. Hughes  
Lady Maesycophant Mrs. Burke  
(Her first appearance here)  
Constantin ..... Mrs. Knight  
Betty Flint ..... Mrs. Jefferson  
Nanny ..... Mrs. Baugues

The entertainment to conclude  
with the musical fare.

**TURN OUT**  
Restive ..... Mrs. Jones  
(from the Chestnut St. Theatre)  
Captain Summerville ..... Mr. Taylor  
(In which he will sing  
"The Soldier's Tear" and  
"Wilt Thou Meet Me There, Love")  
Gregory ..... Mr. Eberle  
Dr. Trunkle ..... Mr. Jefferson  
Forage ..... Mr. Knight  
Cook ..... Mr. Caldwell  
Gardener ..... Mr. Thompson  
Boy ..... Master Burke  
Marian Ramsey ..... Mrs. Jefferson  
(In which she will sing  
"I Am Marian Ramsey")  
Peggy ..... Mrs. Burke

Prices of admission: First tier of boxes and Parquet, \$1; second tier, 50 cents; third tier, 50 cents; Gallery, 25 cents; gallery for people of color, 25 cents. Doors to be opened at a quarter past six, and performances to commence at seven o'clock precisely. Checks not transferable.



JUNIUS BRUTUS BOOTH—Short-Sparce-Muscular.  
Most perfect master of all the signs of the inner  
state of man.

# — a great curtain falls

by  
**George Atkinson and**  
**Victor Kiraly**

**DESIGNED AND PRODUCED UNDER THE CREATIVE  
DIRECTION OF A. EUGENE HAWES**

**Printed and Published by**

**Strand Press**  
225 West 39th Street • New York 18, N. Y.

© By George Atkinson

# Foreword

I have been asked to say a few words about *the National Theatre* . . . at Washington.

I can speak of THAT National Theatre with much more enthusiasm than I might of *A National Theatre*. I have never made any pretense about my attitude toward this latter institution. For fifty years I have worked in and advocated the "commercial" theatre. It is my opinion that plays are written for people to see. Before they see 'em they must go to a Box Office, put down money for a ticket, and dreadful as it sounds, *that is* a commercial transaction.

If the play is what they want they'll come to see it . . . keep it alive and make it possible for the author, the actors, the producer and others to live from it. If it's not what they like, I don't believe they should be forced to take it, any more than the youngster who said, "I say it's spinach and to hell with it," or that the Government should put up money to keep it running for audiences made up of a few people of superior intellect. Even though such a play has so-called high literary qualities, if it lacks *theatrical* entertainment values, the library is the place for it.

The National Theatre in Washington was a great favorite of mine. It was the best tryout theatre in America. It was there that I first presented such great successes as *LIGHTNIN'*, *TURN TO THE RIGHT*, *SEVENTH HEAVEN* and many more down through the

years to *THREE'S A FAMILY* and *CLAUDIA*.

President Wilson saw *LIGHTNIN'*. He let me sit in the box with him. I remember that when he came in he was tired and pale, and as the play went on he braced up and laughed heartily. His doctor, Admiral Carey Grayson, who was with us, said to me, "I have taken away all of the President's medicine and prescribed theatre." I have used that statement frequently to prove that theatre is no luxury but a necessity *as important as medicine*.

Years later another President and his sweet, charming Missus saw the TRY-OUT at the National of my production of *CLAUDIA*, and it was the great First Lady of the World who, speaking of Dorothy McGuire, said, "John, you've found another star."

Opened December 7, 1835, the so-called National Theatre, which was really a fine commercial theatre for 113 years, was taken to the hearts of the Washington citizens and supported by the people, rich and poor. The poor could go because, for a long time, one could get in and see a play in some part of the theatre for some part of a dollar.

Over the years the Managing Directors of the National Theatre—Harry Rapley and Eddie Plohn—were my friends. These gentlemen, under Marcus Heiman's able direction, kept high the quality of the plays and the stars who appeared there.

Because of a serious local issue, by an edict of the Actors' Equity Association, the National Theatre is now—perhaps forever—closed to legitimate plays. The authors of this book tell me that they do not feel that this is the place to discuss either side of that issue.

These authors, George Atkinson and Victor Kiraly, have long been well regarded, and I am willing indeed to endorse their book. Steeped in the traditions of the theatre, with many years of experience "in front and in back of the house," they have, in *A GREAT CURTAIN FALLS*, put together a document that has a potential educational value. I should say it may be regarded as a must in all dramatic departments of colleges and universities. It has all the earmarks of a textbook.

Brilliantly, Messrs. Atkinson and Kiraly have assembled a valuable collection of pictures and stories of stars of those glorious days. Those few square feet back of the curtain-line—of the National—those few old boards have been trod by heroic historical figures of the American Theatre, stirring shadows filled with beloved ghosts of the romantic past—ghosts which bring back grand memories:

Marie Tempest—Maurice Barrymore and his wife, Georgie Drew, mother of the young lady we know today as Ethel Barrymore—Mr. and Mrs. Kendall—Denman Thompson with his perennial *OLD HOMESTEAD*—Maggie Mitchell—the great protean Richard Mansfield, whose range went from a boyish *DON JUAN* to a senile *BARON CHEVRIAL*—the exquis-

ite Kyrie Bellew—the great Modjeska—the really comic gentleman, Thomas Q. Seabrooke, whom I remember so well in *THE ISLE OF CHAMPAGNE*, where wine was cheap and water was as valuable as it is in New York today (the name of his character, fitting those punny days, was *KING POMMERY SEC-OND*)—the great Henry Irving and Edwin Booth—Robert Mantell—Lawrence Barrett—De Wolf Hopper—Sol. Smith Russell—Otis Skinner—Joseph Jefferson—William J. Florence—Nat C. Goodwin—Robson and Crane—Henry E. Dixey—John Drew—E. H. Sothern—J. K. Emmet and Alexander Salvini—lovely ladies like Lillian Russell—Mrs. James Brown Potter—Annie Pixley—Lilly Langtry—Maude Adams—May Irwin—Mary Anderson—Little Corinne—Minnie Maddern Fiske—Kate Claxton—the great Ellen Terry and Ada Rehan—Julia Marlowe—Fay Templeton—Lotta—the brilliant Bernhardt—and a hundred more—if I had the space to list them.

It has often been said that every other form of art—painting, poetry, sculpture, music—has a chance to live on with the years, but the actor's art, the actor's great talent, dies with his Final Curtain. A Great Curtain Falls will at least keep them in remembrance.

A large, flowing cursive signature of the author's name, "John Golden", written in black ink. The signature is highly stylized, with long, sweeping loops and varying line thicknesses.



SARAH BERNHARDT—A lithesome figure which glided upon the stage with the grace of a leopard. Suffered a thousand deaths before fame and fortune came to her.

**W**hen man crosses the zone of actuality into the world of Make Believe he must be armed to combat unseen forces, just as the dreamer must react to the realities of life when he comes out of his reverie, to avoid the pitfalls of imagination. Whether in reverse, in either direction as the case may be, there is conflict between a man's reason and his imagination.

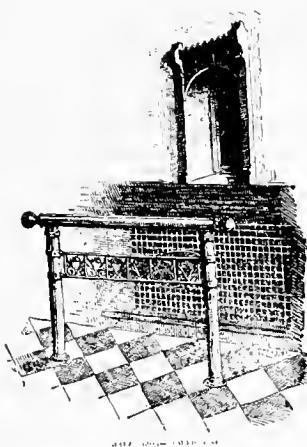
Thus the world of Make-Believe resents man's approach to it. Only when he is able to approach it in the guise of its own will o'the wisp, hobnobs with its harpies and nymphs, and do a rumba with succubus and succuba, can he bend it to his will and make it do his bidding, make it imitate in an artificial mood his own world of realities. Dividends and assets will not give him that affluence. Though there is no man without imagination, and life would be a sad affair without it, and though there may be two worlds with it instead of one, there is little reconciliation between man's fancy and reason. Perhaps dramatic creation is an art because man on occasion may bend this world of Make-Believe to his will.

The theatre is always afflicted with growing pains; it is always growing and is always in pain. In a state of flux, development, growth, lapse; indeed its *flux de paroles* makes it a problem child. Frequently it is fed with hot air which gives it the colic. Growth presupposes impediment; it inspires prattle and multiloquence from the rank and file. Even when bent to man's will this world of Make-Believe is Frankenstein in the mask of a child, with claws always sharpened and but lightly shielded. It is rarely tamed.

Because of the impedimenta of the theatre it has evolved a written law; it is the law of the Act of Providence. Birth, death, flood, fire, war, pestilence, and a half dozen other unseen actualities, come under this Act of Providence; any one may impede the enactment of a play and be the means of closing a theatre. And rarely is the actor himself the motive for these acts, for there is another law, unwritten law, in the theatre, and it is "the play must go on," and



JENNY LIND—No empress held a more sovereign court. Nothing was talked of but Jenny Lind.



even in illness and pain the seasoned thespian will do his bit. The exception to the rule is the death knell sounded for the passing of the legitimate theatre in this country's capital, Washington, D. C. It is the actor himself who has put the quietus on the only real theatre the National of the nation's capital which has supported the theatre of the spoken drama for a century and a half, continuously, since 1799, of which there is any authentic record, though harassed by high taxes, numerous conflagrations, and apathy on the part of most heads of state, religious prejudice and an assassination, perhaps the most tragic episode in national history.

To the above list of actualities which may come under the Act of Providence and impede the enactment of a play should be added a new one, racial discrimination, the capital itself having an unwritten law that no black man shall cross the threshold of its theatre. Perhaps this is the first time since the founding of the theatre three thousand years ago that race prejudice has been the motive of closing a theatre. The actor himself makes the situation unique because of his refusal to perform, except to a mixed audience, so both the African and the Caucasian are denied access to the theatre. In the vernacular there is no "roof" in the nation's capital under which plays tragic, comic, or serio-comic may be performed.

No roof. Frequently in these times a production is in rehearsal, actors engaged, money trouble at an end, but no roof available, no booking, and no New York house, because of a shortage of houses in the latter case. But there is always a to-morrow in show business. Washington today has no roof for itinerant troupes, and thus is history repeating itself, for there was no roof for the band of strolling players who gave performances for the entertainment of the inhabitants of Georgetown, now merged in the City of Washington, a century and a half ago. An authentic record has the date fixed at 1799, about the time when the site was chosen for the District of Columbia and the United States Capital, when one Archibald Marlborough Hamilton Sterling appeared in Georgetown with a



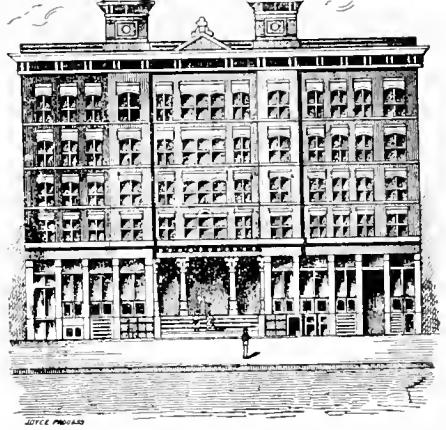
FORREST—Like a Roman gladiator.



JANAUSCHEK—With Pomp and Stateliness.



LOTTA—(Charlotte Mignon Crabtree)  
"The Unapproachable."  
—Pictured as "The Little Marchioness."



troupe of strolling players seeking a roof for the performance of his play and a habitat for the members of his company.

No doubt AMHS was a rugged individualist with the courage of his convictions to venture to this quagmire with its shacks and ram-shackle lean-tos tottering with what breezes came from the Potomac, with the showman's optimism and not much else. Likely he and his players came from England via Philadelphia, having learned that these shambles, now yelept District of Columbia, had been selected by this young Republic for the home of their Big Chief and his satellites. There had been no advance work done by this actor-manager, no harbinger of the arrival of these players, no avant-courier with bills to announce the time and the place of the performance. Foot-sore, unkempt, hungry they arrived in an inhospitable community, a sorry spectacle to a gaping citizenry. However they had that English tenacity of purpose and the slogan which has opened many a back stage door and permitted man to approach a hostile world of Make-Believe, namely, "The play must go on."

It is not known whether AMHS and his players gave a performance in the street by torch light or whether a roof was found under which they played by early candle light. It is known that there was no star dressing room, scenic equipment or air cooling. Indeed it must have been a primitive performance in a primitive country with the two worlds of actuality and Make-Believe so closely knitted that one might not tell one from the other. And strange as it may appear this Washington, D. C. premiere of 1799 has all of the aspects of the current time when there is no roof, no star dressing room, no air-conditioning system in all of Washington where the itinerant (strolling player) actor can frisk and gambol and forget his ego in his world of Make-Believe. This similarity between the remote past and the present may be traced further, and certainly deeper, to show that the nation's capital theatres, meaning not only the structures, but their staffs and operatives, have been beset by the same obstacles that confronted the old



ELLEN TERRY—Her Ophelia and Portia were incomparable.

showman, for the past hundred and fifty years. Race prejudice is likely the only *bete noire* which did not rear its head when AMHS made overtures for a permit and a roof that he might entertain them and theirs with the actor-manager's *divertissement*.

Evidently he was courteously received with the hand of welcome, but the palm was upturned and a tax of \$6 per performance was demanded. This tax has never been rescinded or even suspended from the theatre. The theatre seemed only a source of revenue to those yokels, those money-grubbers; and this is the view United States Senators and Congressmen have taken leveling a tax on the drama of an exorbitant fee which would have purchased an orchestra seat some years ago. But when one stops to consider that there are not more than sixty legitimate theatres in the United States, and thirty odd of those in New York City, and perhaps no more than twenty million people of a population of hundred forty millions, really theatre-minded, it may be readily observed that agrarian branches of the U. S. Legislature have had little sympathy and less understanding of the theatre and all it holds.

In the early history of the drama in the District of Columbia there are no records of performances prior to the AMHS repertoires in Georgetown, though an old show bill some 10 by 12 inches and dated 1786, was found in Washington announcing the appearance of the Old American Company in "School for Scandal" and "Love a la Mode," but the supposition is that this bill had reference to the appearance of this company in Philadelphia in the plays named, for Washington at that time was only a wilderness with a sparse settlement of natives. However there is a record of a theatrical performance at the Great Hotel, a tavern, in 1800, the year following the Georgetown premiere by the strolling players. There are no detailed accounts of such a performance and its authenticity may be questioned.

However there is a "first theatre" or opera house in every capital of the world. Its upkeep and perpetuity reflects the cultural life



E. L. DAVENPORT—First appearance in "Richard, III," in 1855.



RISTORI—She was Medea, Mary Queen of Scots, Queen Elizabeth—Beau ideal of the democratic stage.



ROBSON and CRANE—Those two princes of good fellows—One good pair to draw from.



JAMES K. HACKETT—Only one Falstaff.

of the community. The theatre is a shrine to man's imagination, and it is upon man's imagination alone that the seven arts are born, and the theatre must rank first of these because this world of Make-Believe is peopled with symbols of his own image in flesh and blood and not in oils, minerals and stones as are the kindred arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture. So Washington had its first theatre as New York has its first night; it was in 1804. Its site was at Eleventh and C Streets. And, as significant as it may seem, it was called The Theatre. It was built by a stock company. A poor thing indeed, but a theatre. It burned down after some years of popularity, and a new structure named the City Assembly Rooms succeeded it. This was a combination of saloon, dancing academy, and ball rooms and was remodeled subsequently to compete with the National Theatre. When remodeled it was called the Washington Theatre. It was in this house that a play had a run of two weeks with Wallack and Davenport, and a play called "How She Loves Him" was given its world premiere March 1865, the second inaugural year of Lincoln. At a later time the Theatre Comique succeeded the Washington upon the latter's original site.

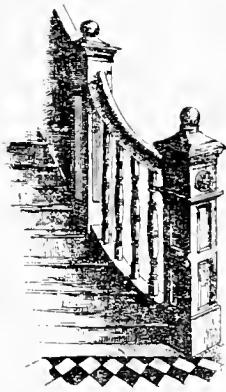
Thus Washington's first theatre did not come until 1804, a decade after work of laying out the capital city began under the command of Major L'Enfant, for it was in 1794 that this "distinguished astronomer," so called by the Georgetown Weekly Record, was assigned the agendum of designing the city that should eclipse in dignity and beauty all other world capitals, and Major Elliott was commissioned to lay out the ten miles square of territory which was to encompass the District of Columbia. In the interim the first theatre burned to the ground, as stated, and as late as 1822 a theatre of sorts, The City Assembly Rooms, came upon the scene. These and a series of others came up like mushrooms, a natural fungus of this quagmire of the 18th Century, like step children or Topsy herself — to use a mixed metaphor — and treated with ill respect and indifference by the distinguished astronomer, builders



IRVING—As Shylock—"And thrift is blessing if men steal it not."



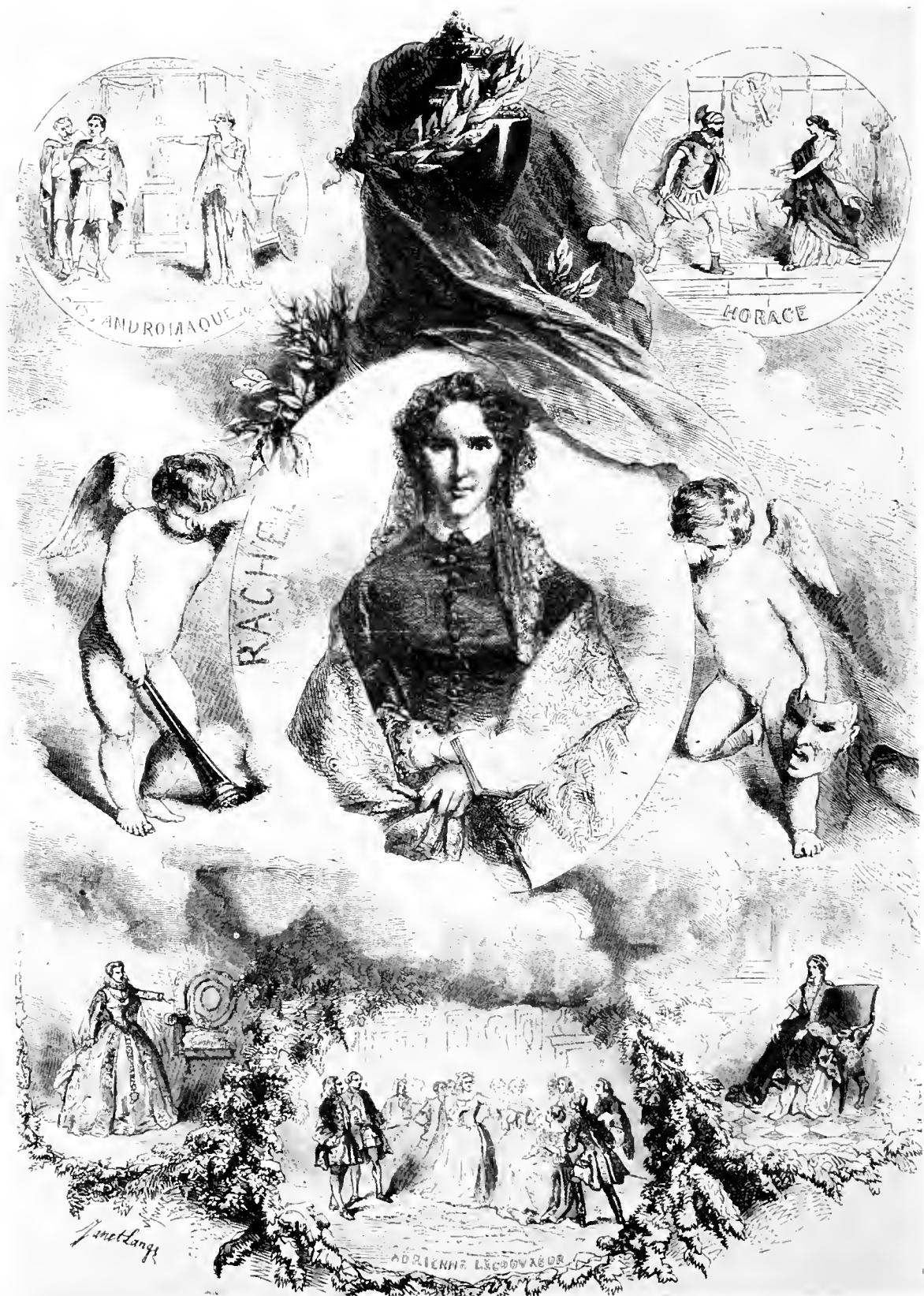
IRVING—as Hamlet—"You cannot take from me anything that I will part with all except my life, except my life, except my life."



and city fathers. With plans laid and executed to build a city to emulate the beauty, magnificence and splendor of the French capital, Paris, and with this consummation achieved, a theatre or opera house has never been designed in a city destined to rival the old world shrines erected in honor of the arts. The playhouse and all it connotes is a step child of the arts. The proof is written on the pages of both remote and recent history which discloses a series of theatrical calamities with no helping hand raised.

Not alone in Washington but throughout the length and breadth of the 48 states is the coolness and hebetude towards the legitimate theatre, and though the reason may be given by the citation of a dozen alibis the blame may be placed at the doors of the communities or the public, and if at the latter, it shows a cultural spirit at low ebb. It is a sad commentary to record that many state capitals of the 48 have no theatre; such states as New York, Connecticut, California, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Wisconsin and the entire southern group have no theatre in their capitals for the spoken drama. True these and many cities throughout the land have auditoriums and arenas, civic structures put up by the community, though in some cases they have come as a gift from some civic spirited individual, ambitious to keep his name perpetually in the spot light. Most of these are white elephants in the red mostly, for if they have come as a gift it is usually up to the city fathers to see to their upkeep. Millions have been contributed to these monstrosities. They are playgrounds with a roof fit only for army drill and basket ball. Some such as the ones in Kansas City and Hartford are architecturally pleasing to look at, whereas some, such as the arenas in Toledo and Providence shock not only the aesthetic but the utilitarian, for they lack even the facilities for animal comfort, and as a rule are without box office, dressing rooms and a dozen other requisites for a real theatre. Itinerant companies on long jumps are booked in these places. Few have a stage.

It will be argued that with these auditoriums and other structures,



the few companies readied for the road will find quarters to exploit their wares. That if the play's the thing, plans for a reception are secondary; it is a sort of hysteria, this hue and cry of a theatre shortage. Putting the cart before the horse.

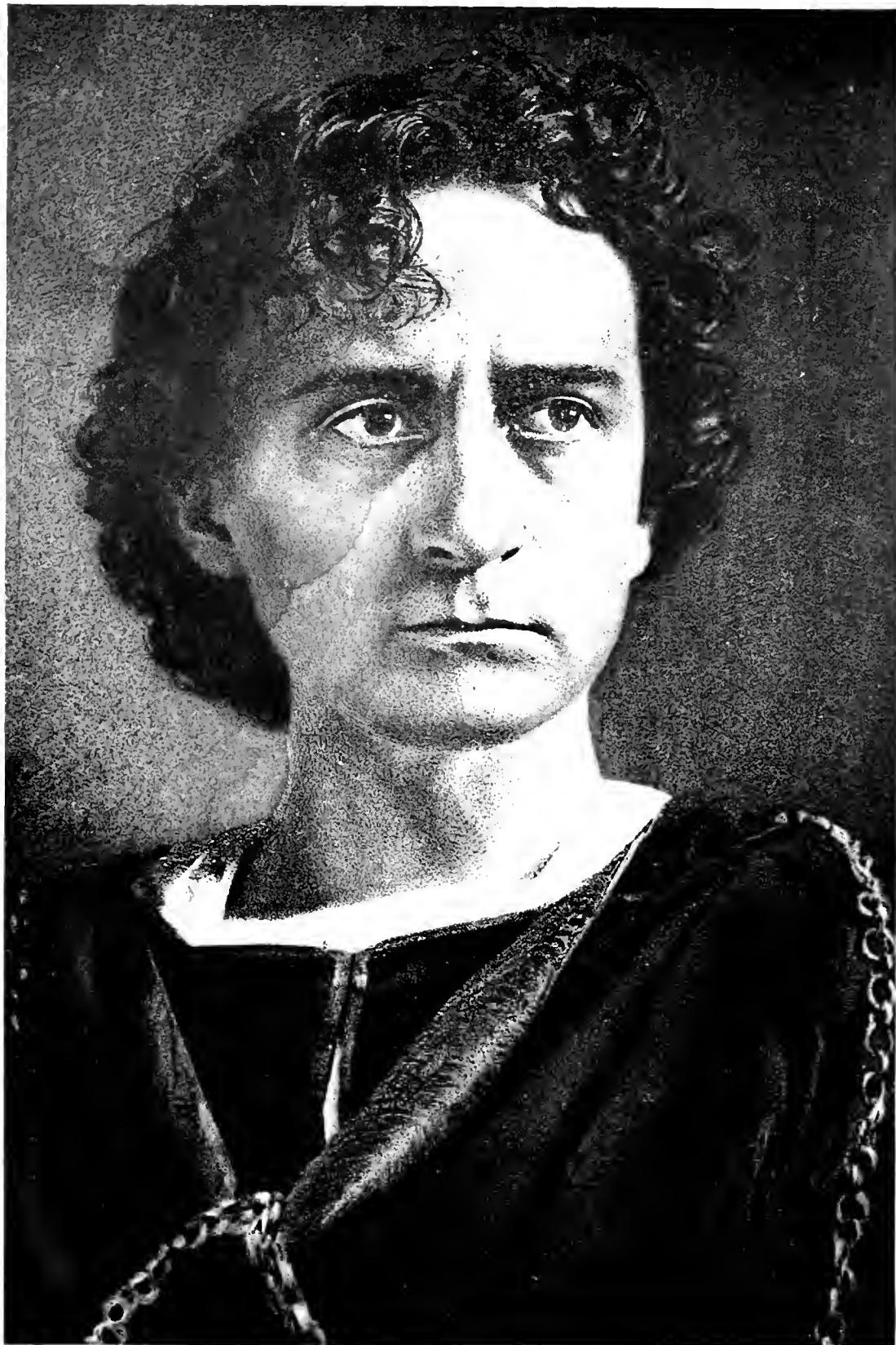
What matter if the New York theatre is antiquated? What matter if there is no theatre in the nation's capital for housing the legitimate drama? These are potential questions, and significant, pointing to the organic ills of the fabulous invalid. A roof may be a convenience for the spoken drama, but not a necessity. George M. Cohan put his finger on the spot when he said "It's the man behind the pencil." It's the written word.

Houses may crumble into dust, but the written word knows no demolition and goes on forever, though it becomes a thing of the library unless there is one to sense its merit. This one is called "showman" in the argot of show business. In the old days he had the courage of his convictions; today he is a pessimist, largely by virtue of an economic situation with which he is unable to cope without financial aid outside the precincts of the stage.

There is a group of theatre-minded people organized under the cognomen of the American National Theatre and Academy; but for the sake of publicity, or exploitation, or brevity the title has been abbreviated to ANTA, which is neither Greek nor Latin and has none of the staying powers of good old Anglo Saxon. It is a pity this group has not stood by its guns to let the world know that it is their ambition to promote an American National theatre under the supervision of the U. S. Government.

Believing they should have sponsors, people of the theatre and friends of the theatre, they had little difficulty in securing a list of important names, but apparently little has come from their work the past three years.

Much publicity has been given to their efforts to secure the Belasco Theatre, now a government warehouse, in Washington. It is only a shell and would require a fortune to reclaim for practical



EDWIN BOOTH—A chip off the old block — As great as was his illustrious father.

**purposes.** Should it come under the jurisdiction of this group, where will the members get the attractions to put in it? Washington is not a long run city; record runs are "Harvey," seven weeks; "The Birth of a Nation," six weeks, and "Oklahoma," four weeks. Currently it can be only a one-theatre city. For instance, Los Angeles the fourth city in the United States, with a population of 1,504,277 has only one legitimate house which is dark half the season.

With its energy and tenacity of purpose, its ambition — and surely it is a commendable undertaking it has set for itself though most of its members may lack full knowledge of the intricacies and perplexities and technique of show business—why have they not approached the Government to build a theatre which will point to high heaven and proclaim the glory of one of the cardinal arts? And why should not such a National theatre be built in New York City instead of the capital?

ANTA shows a prejudicial front in choice of the Belasco, Washington, where the only legitimate theatre is dark because of racial discrimination. Why not the capitals Hartford, Providence, Albany, Sacramento? Perhaps ANTA is a bit commercially-minded itself, for the success of the old National Theatre is well known to all.

But it is inclined to make snoots at the commercial theatre. In fact in the literature which it has distributed there is a tendency to devalue the Broadway theatre, the commercial theatre so called, and ANTA has used the term "status quo" to signify the sins, the blunders, the shortcomings and the mistakes of that bête noire, the commercial theatre. But somehow the commercial theatre has breasted the storm for hundreds of years, whether rooted in Broadway or Piccadilly, and as a commercial theatre the old National managed to live through storm and stress for 113 years.

Why scoff at the status quo when offering no remedy for the old ailment? The theatre has always had growing pains. Why not make friends with status quo? Ally themselves with it? Why not get the good will and co-operation of Broadway showmen? True



EDWIN FORREST—As Spartacus.

JOE JEFFERSON—Climbed from the bottom —  
America's finest comedian of his day.





such men as George Tyler, Chas. Dillingham, Flo Ziegfeld, Oliver Moroso and Geo. Lederer died bankrupt. But such people as John Golden, the Shuberts, Gilbert Miller, The Guild, Hammerstein and Rodgers, Arthur Hopkins, Breck Pemberton, Katharine Cornell, Guthrie McClintic, Max Gordon, the Playwrights, and many others are in the Broadway scene, and who in the theatre would want to change the status quo, if this sums up their experience and their outstanding theatre achievements? If one makes a mistake must he be criticized because of his membership in the commercial theatre, even if he is blessed with only that theatre instinct which does not seem to come out of college or university or workshop.

ANTA hasn't been content to confine its interest to the Broadway scene, but has reached out to the hinterland, especially to the colleges and the universities. Here should be a harvest for this group's enterprise, for the schools of late have become legitimate theatre-minded.

Why should not the students give more attention to the drama; playwriting, acting, producing? As the drama is becoming a rare thing, a novelty in the small communities, perhaps faculty and student may turn to it with their creative efforts. Yet, playwriting, acting and producing have not come out of the places of learning. There may be an answer for this.

It is a sad commentary, but the creative work of the theatre has not come from the university or the college student. Plautus, the Roman comic poet and dramatist who came upon the scene about 254 B.C., did not burn the midnight oil, nor did his Roman contemporary Terence, in fact they were slaves and may have had little formal education. Yet Shakespeare and Molire based some of their plays upon the former's works. Shakespeare may have learned the three R's in the Stratford grammar school, but it cannot be denied with authority that he held the horses for patrons of the London theatre and served as call boy just as Joe Jefferson served as front



WILLIAM E. SHERIDAN—As Louis XIII.



EDWIN BOOTH—As Richelieu.



J. LESTER WALLACK — Forest Scene — Benedick.  
"Well, everyone can master a grief but he that  
has it," in "MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING."

door ticket taker at the Washington National. Ibsen was an apothecary's apprentice and Shaw clerked in a Dublin land agent's office. Then there's Sean O'Casey, Noel Coward, and Geo. M. Cohan and Brioux and Pinero who were never taught the art of playwriting, though Eugene O'Neill did have some months in Professor Baker's drama workshop. Moss Hart, the foremost drama satirist of this country, was stenographer for Gus Pitou, just a short time before he became a successful playwright, and could have had no college schooling.

What student of the drama does not know of the poverty of Sarah Bernhardt and her struggle to keep body and soul together before the plaudits came to her from the crowd? Malnutrition in her youth when she rode bare back in a circus shortened the life of Jeanne Eagels who began her short and brilliant stage career in the chorus. These had not even the rudiments of the common school; nor had Fay Templeton who made her stage debut at three. Neither the Booth family nor the Barrymore family, except Father Maurice, had the advantages of college training.

Self educated have been those practitioners of show business; those showmen, Flo Ziegfeld, Sam Harris, Al Woods, Wm. Brady, ad infinitum. They had no time for school. A great trimvirate this status quo --- playwright, actor, producer --- stigmatized geographically. But is not ANTA of the Broadway scene?

Washington grew and grew. Like the civic spirited fathers of the state capitals, libraries and galleries, monuments to the dead, post offices and mints and auditoriums were dreamed of and designed and built, shrines to point to the glory of an act or an achievement of mankind, usually departed this life, but not a roof, not a pinnacle to point to high heaven and proclaim the glory of man's world of Make-Believe. Out of a wilderness, which still smells to high heaven in midsummer, has come one of the most beautiful cities in the world, and still embryonic, for obelisks, pillars and columns undreamed of will come as will tomorrow. And all these years the mushroom playhouses have silently come and departed, mostly in flames, unsung. Built mostly by rugged individualists.



E. H. SOTHERN—As Lord Dundreary



JULIA MARLOWE — Rosalind: "Ah, how full of briers is this working-day world"



JULIA MARLOWE—Most versatile actress of her era.

Yet the native and the visitor within the gates became theatre-minded withal.

But there was a potential theatre public elsewhere, for in the era of the 18th century, and as early as the middle of the 17th century, prior to the first playhouses in Washington, the older places such as Baltimore, New York, Philadelphia and Charleston, built theatres and operated them. Charleston's Dock Street Theatre was opened Feb. 12, 1736, and this city claims it was the first building designed for theatrical use in America, though theatrical records show that a house was built in Williamsburg, Virginia, in 1716. If such is the case, it would be the first house in the English-American Colonies. However, New York City had its theatres about that time. Perhaps the first theatre in New York was on Kip Street and was finished for occupancy about 1750. It was probably called the Nassau Street Theatre. Then followed the John Street, The Royal, Crnger's Wharf, Beekman Street, the old Bowery and scores of others.

Where are these houses now? What occupies their sites today? The spaces they had occupied have not been given over to farming. Only printed records show that they existed at all, and the years of their construction may be disputed. Even the street Kip is no more, this being the street where the first New York house was put up. Scores of houses came after these of the 18th century, but they are only a memory. All of the houses in Manhattan today are of modern construction, having been built the past forty or fifty years, with the Empire probably predating them. So it may be stated with some authority that the Washington National Theatre, which was opened to the public Dec. 7, 1835, with "The Man of the World," is the only theatre in the United States which has weathered the Act of Providence, whether ordained by God or natural causes, and has operated continuously until August, 1948. That is a broad statement and may be qualified somewhat, for during this time there was a period of seven years when there were no performances and



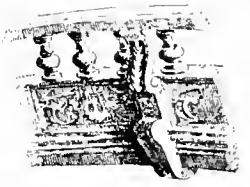
JOHN DREW (Petruchio)—"Upon Sunday is the wedding day."



ADA REHAN (Katharina)—"I'll see thee hanged on Sunday first!"



Scene from Shakespeare's "Taming of the Shrew," produced by Augustin Daly with Rehan and Drew.



intervals when the National was burned down and new structures built and an improvised hall was hastily put up after one of the fires for a concert engagement of Mlle. Jenny Lind. With the plaster scarcely dry and the smell of paint still apparent, the hall was opened for this concert Dec. 16, 1859. In all events there has been a house of entertainment called The National on the site where the dark house now stands for one hundred and thirteen years—unless it has been given over to the films, though pictures have rarely been shown there, "The Birth of a Nation" holding a six weeks record run.

The National had other predecessors besides those mentioned which includes the Washington, later called the American which had great popularity in 1828 and thereafter when it was remodeled, the Adelphi, The Oxford, Ford's Tenth Street, and Wall's Opera House. During this period halls were opened for both the drama and variety shows and concerts. One of the most popular of these was the Forrest Hall in Georgetown where there was everything offered from prize fights to Shakespeare repertoire. Two Odd Fellow's Halls gave dramatic and musical entertainments and Negro minstrels. The Willard was notable for its lectures around 1864 by prominent people such as P. T. Barnum and E. P. Whipple, and it was in this hall that the pianist Gottschalk gave his last concert, assisted by Carlo Patti, violinist, brother of the great Adelina. Other halls were the Carroll, Lincoln, and Metropolitan, the first-named being noted for the readings by Charles Dickens, the novelist, upon his visit to this country.

The National had a close competitor in Ford's Tenth Street Theatre. The original building was a Baptist church and was altered for a theatre in 1858 when it had burned the second time. After about a year of popularity this house was also destroyed by fire. To some of the devout this was an Act of Providence, a judgment against those who had turned a house of worship into a playhouse. It was soon rebuilt, however. Its doors were closed with the most



WM HARRIS—Supported Sothern and Marlowe in a Shakespearian cycle



BERT LAHR—A superb artist who masks his personality wholly in his stage creations.



KATHARINE HEPBURN—Great stars have given their artistry and fine talents to the lovesick Rosalind in "As You Like It." Miss Hepburn is a great star.



HENRY MILLER—An actor-manager-producer of distinction. Henry Miller's Theatre epitomizes his brilliant stage career.

tragic curtain in the annals of the world's theatres, the assassination of President Lincoln by John Wilkes Booth.

Though confronted with this tragedy, bankruptcies and calamitous fires and the indifference of the state politic, Washington has never been without a theatre until the present, though there have been periods of short duration when there were no attractions. Though the parent capital Washington has grown with the growth of its satellites, the state capitals and the country in toto, though it never gives out anything itself, produces no material thing except a medium of exchange printed and moulded in its mint, like a centipede it reaches out to the four corners of the country and attracts things and people to the Capitol steps. An upstart, its growth has been rapid in size and population, and twenty five years ago as a theatrical center it was competing with such major cities as Boston and Philadelphia. At that time there were five theatres in the capital, namely The National, Belasco, Poli's, the Columbia and the Garrick, and undoubtedly Washington for its size was the outstanding theatrical city of the country. Though Washington had a large Negro population then, they were segregated in the city as they are in many cities of the South. All through the years actors played to white people in these houses and the houses of the South, and seemed unconcerned with the color problem and the Negro seemed cold to the white man's entertainment. In fact, the Negro is not a theatre-goer.

Whether Marcus Heiman, owner and manager of the National, or Equity, the actor, are correct in their views of the color question, whether contrary or arbitrary, is a moot question and this treatise is not concerned with the pros and cons. It is known, however, that the National, whether by an unwritten law in the nation's capital, or not, did operate under the segregation dictum as early as 1835 as the play bill for the theatre's premiere, that being the date the house opened—this programme is in preservation—definitely states "gallery for people of color 25 cents." For 113 years this



JOHN GOLDEN, producer, and FRANK BACON, star of "Lightenin'," holding the (then) long distance world record, 1291, consecutive performances at the Golden Theatre, New York.

Some of John Golden's other productions which were before the public for years are TURN TO THE RIGHT, SEVENTH HEAVEN, and many more, including THREE'S A FAMILY and CLAUDIA of late years.

Circumscribed by an earlier school, when his co-producers were Cohan and Harris, David

Belasco, Florenz Ziegfeld, Charles Dillingham, Wm. Brady, Henry Miller, Al Woods—and other great showmen who played the National year after year—and the theatre of today, with such men as Max Gordon, Gilbert Miller, the Shuberts, Arthur Hopkins, Brock Pemberton, the Playwrights, Theatre Guild, Rodgers and Hammerstein, also of the earlier school, he brings to the theatre an experience and an understanding which few are able to share. FIFTY YEARS in the theatre is a LONG RUN. But THAT is his record, too. May it be an INDEFINITE run.



JOHN W. ALBAUGH



FANNY DAVENPORT—Lisp'd the villainy of Richard III at the age of twelve.



HENRY J. MONTAGUE—One of the great comedians of the English stage.

was the policy of the National during the days when it had half a dozen competitors, and of late years when it had no rival at all. It took the actor 113 years to determine that there should be no discrimination in the character of his audience. The finest actors of two continents, and they have had no equals since their time, played without being in the least concerned with the color or the quality of their patrons, and as the records show their audiences were not selective audiences in the olden days. It is likely many actors regret Equity's procedure in the situation and point to the low theatre-going record of the Negro and lament the loss of a Washington engagement especially in these times of theatre shortage. Some may ask "Why should the actor with his unwritten law and his written law, an Act of Providence, infringe upon the unwritten law of his nation's capital?" They may point to the engagement of Paul Robeson in the role of "Othello" with Uta Hagen as "Desdemona" and to the small Negro audiences in attendance, though the former may be the greatest actor of his race, and thereby try to prove that the Negro is disinterested in theatricals. They will not deny that Negroes attended that performance of "Othello," but the audiences were made up largely of white people and with women the larger percentage of these.

Probably the Washington Negro has not been approached regarding his sentiment or judgment in the matter. That there should be such an unwritten law in Washington seems tout au contraire to state rights and civic rights, so much in the affairs of politics today, and a faux pas in a presidential year when the three parties are courting the Negro vote. Perhaps the weathered politician is a hypocrite or a prophet, sensing the disinterestedness of the Negro for the nonce; for the Negro has always loomed bigger in the political arena than in the theatre world.

It is evident that the outside world brought race prejudice to the capital, for it seemed not to be on parade there until the publicity and notoriety given to the subject by the National Theatre episode,



JOHN H. McVICKER—



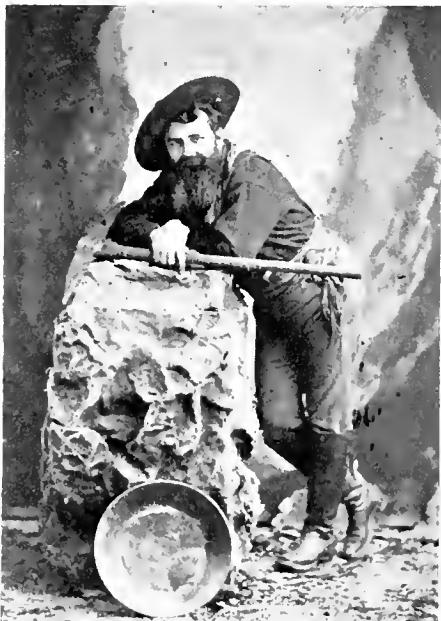
ADELAIDE NEILSON — The Fairest of All Fair Women she came surrounded by her own rosy cloud of love. A patrician by nature.



TAYLOR GRANVILLE—



HENRY J. MONTAGUE—Won the hearts of all with his natural, genial acting.  
JOHN McCULLOUGH—His friends called him genial Mac. The National was his love. His genius illuminated his roles.



McKEE RANKIN—a fine actor who trained young talent.



JOHN INCE—Scion of an acting family.

for all seemed serene within its gates. There have been race riots in other cities, but no record of one in Washington. It reared its head, however, when the management of "The Birth of a Nation" planned to present this film in the National twenty odd years ago. Washington was the last key city to be visited, largely because of party politics. It was a lurid, sensational story, derogatory to the black man, and though corny it was keyed to ferment the prejudices of both the white and the black man. It was the first feature picture and toured the country with an orchestra of twenty pieces and a baggage car of effects, as it was a silent and props were used back stage in lieu of the synchronized voice and sounds of the modern cinema.

When first presented there was a protestation from the Negro. Undoubtedly he had cause for resentment. But he was circumspect and undoubtedly the dissension would have gone unnoticed had not the management and publicity agent made capital of it. The race element was the pivotal subject of all publicity material distributed. Then politics entered into the exploitation campaign. A Republican administration of Ohio banned its appearance in that state. It was admitted there after a waiting period of two years when a Democratic governor took office. And thus it was kept out of Washington. When it finally came the management prepared for a riotous reception, but the Washington Negro was conspicuous by his absence, and the affair turned out to be a tempest in a teapot, though the film ran in the National for six weeks to capacity business.

Though Junius Brutus Booth appeared at the National in the role of "Hamlet," and then as Iago and "Richard III," soon after the house was opened in 1838, and J. H. Hackett appeared subsequently as Falstaff and Booth and Forrest came a little later—great thespians—and little Fanny Davenport, aged 11, from Drury Lane Theatre, London, came to do "Richard III," when she lisped the villainy of the part, and Vanderhoff came from London's Covent



#### FIRST NIGHTERS LETTER—1845

Washington, Friday, Jan. 17, 1845

I beg leave to submit through the columns of your paper the subjoined rules for the better management of the theatre.

Vive la politesse!

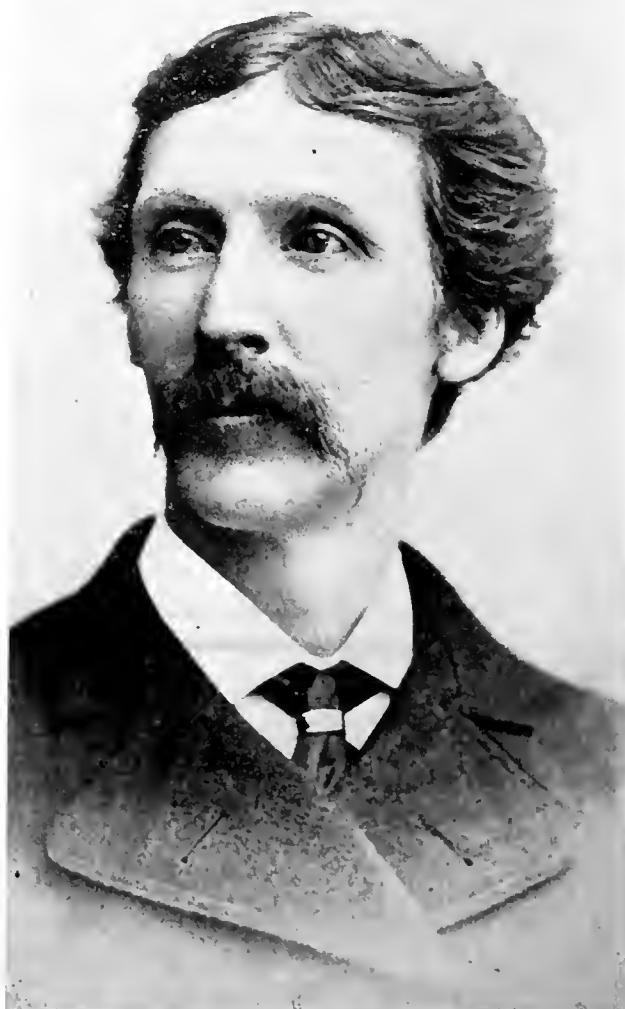
1. That no spectator be expected to sit, if he chooses to stand it being a gross infringement of the rights of an American citizen to attempt to restrict or otherwise regulate the free use of his limbs.
2. That for like return, he elevates his legs, or stick them out at any angle, oblique or acute, most conducive to his comfort.
3. That the good old national diversion of chewing and spitting tobacco, ad libitum, is an alienable right of the American citizen.
4. That on a benefit night any individual may use three seats for the accommodation of his feet, cudgel, dog or other indispensable appurtenance.
5. That no spectator, whether standing or sitting, be subjected to that impertinent cry of "hats off in front."
6. That any attempt to suppress loud talking, whooping, haw-hawing, swearing or the like, will not be tolerated as it is the most fragrant violation of the great safe-guard of the Republic, the liberty of free speech.
7. That in an event of a set-to, between two belligerents that they be allowed to have it out, undisturbed to those millions of the law, called policemen.
8. That for encouragement of native musical talent the standing orchestra overture shall be some approved chef d'oeuvre of the great Ethlophan masters, as "Possum Up the Gum Tree," "Sally Come Up," "That Yellow Gal Smiled at Me."
9. That a copy of these resolutions be affixed to the play bill.

Salve Republica!

OLD SITTER.



JOHN McCULLOUGH — A born actor and a princely gentleman.



BARTLEY CAMPBELL—Melo Actor, and America's pioneer playwright.

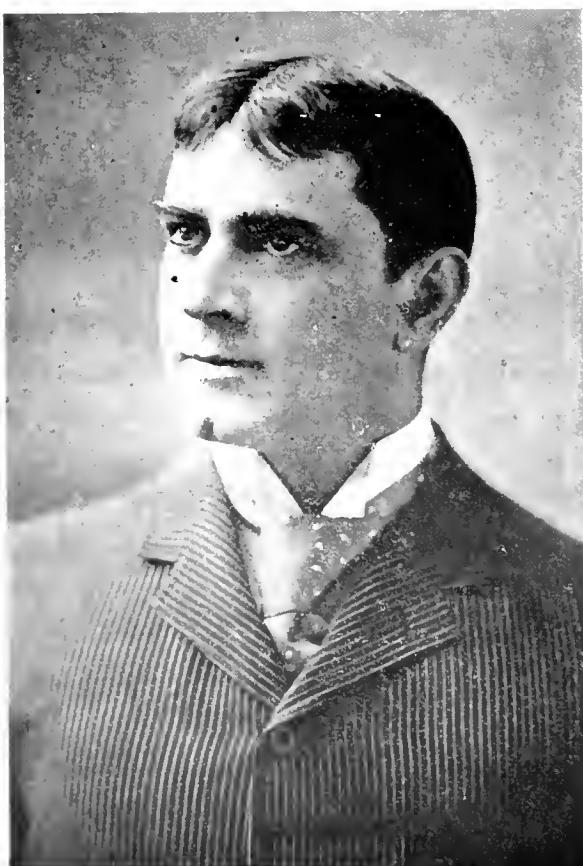
Garden to do "Hamlet," hard days came upon the National. Fashion and wealth of the city seemed to stay at home and the report was current that the theatre was in the hands of street arabs and gangsters. The blame was placed in part upon the management. The cynical letter from a first-nighter should be significant and how the type of audiences these fine actors had to appear before; evidently it was not a selective audience in 1845 when the letter was sent to a newspaper and the management. (See Opposite Page)

There were other causes than the type of audiences depicted by the old sitter which kept many of the National's regular patrons from the performances. During this era the city was spread over a considerable area, the streets were unpaved, and only Pennsylvania Avenue was lighted and that by oil lamps. There were no street-cars and only two horse hacks, the driver charging a fare of \$10 for a trip to the theatre and return, no matter how short the haul, and distances seemed greater in those days than today. There was only one route to reach the theatre most of the roads being impassable swamps. So for some years the theatre was some times open but more often closed.

That lean days had come upon the National does not make news today. There might have been inefficient managers from time to time, but dealing with personalities as the showman does today he must have a strong heart to stand the headaches which come to him daily. With the close proximity of the new city to Philadelphia and Baltimore, where theatres were established with talented companies, he was able to book some of these into the National, but there were no systems in the booking those days and transportation to the city was chaotic as a rule; so most frequently he had to secure the services of roving troupes. The real news is the report handed down from those distant times that any theatre existed at all, handicapped as it was; and that Washingtonians supported a theatre at



THE BARRYMORE FAMILY—Georgia Drew Barrymore, mother and her children, Ethel, Lionel, John.  
THE ROYAL FAMILY



MAURICE BARRYMORE—Lawyer-painter-sculptor-  
actor, Sire of the Royal Family.



all for 45 years, the Old Sitter's letter being dated 1845, forty-six years following the appearance of the strolling players which was in 1799. Perhaps there was much truth expressed in this letter relative to the conduct and calibre of the audience, though the Jenny Lind audience gathered for her appearance five years later, in 1850, must have comported itself with aplomb and discernment, and a measure of breeding, if its quality may be gauged by the top price of a seat which was \$7, an advance of \$6 for the usual entertainment. However as recently as 1852, "The Hunchback," with Matilda Heron—printed this line: "Gentlemen are earnestly requested to use the spittoons and spare the floor."

So fifteen years earlier, when the National opened in 1835, Washington was a city of magnificent distances with unpaved broad avenues and no pavements. Slush and mud ruled. On either side of the avenue and opposite the site of the National were houses of all kinds, many in the last stages of decay. In short, Washington was a dead city with no business; the only money in circulation came from the government employees. Charles Dickens in his American notes writing in 1842, said:

Take the worst parts of the straggling parts of Paris, where the houses are the smallest, preserving the oddities . . . burn the whole down, build it up again in wood and plaster . . . put green blinds on the outside of the private houses, with a red curtain and a white one in every window, plow up the roads, erect three handsome buildings in stone and marble anywhere, but more entirely out of everybody's way the better, call one the Post Office, one the Patent Office and one the Treasury, make it scorching hot in the morning, and freezing cold in the evening, with an occasional tornado of wind and dust, leave a brickfield in all central places, where a street may be naturally expected, and that's Washington.



CLARA MORRIS (Camille) — with a voice of unshed tears.



ROSE COGHLAN—The Jersey Rose



FLORENCE—"The Mighty Dollar" was his stock in trade.



MAGGIE MITCHELL — Washington's perennial Sweetheart—entertained at the White House by President Lincoln.

And with the erection of these "handsome buildings in stone and marble" the National stands today in conformity to the unsightly structure described by Dickens, for though the most prosperous theatre in the world externally it is nondescript, and would not exist at all had it not been for the efforts and a meagre supply of funds of a half score of public-spirited Washingtonians.

With the obstacles confronting them the wonderment is that there were those who had ambition and foresight enough to invest in a theatrical venture. However there were those who were amusement-minded and believed that the capital of the United States should have a theatre worthy of the name. A stock company was formed by Henry Randall, Richard Smith, Cornelius McLean, Jr., George Gibson and William Brent. Some of these failed to subscribe to the funds for the building so W. W. Corcoran supplied additional money so the present site lots 3 and 4 in square 234 was transferred to the stock company for the erection of a theatre Oct. 16, 1834. As has usually been the case with theatrical enterprises, there was money trouble. And as usual this is usually overcome. Though there was some argument as regards the location for the theatre, some believing that it should be built near the Capitol, then the center of the town's population, others foresaw a change in this in the direction of the White House and their judgment was finally acted upon.

As stated, the National opened December 7, 1835 with "The Man of the World." The lessees and managers were the Messrs. Haywood, Bowbotham and Pratt, the latter serving also as business manager. An award of \$50 was offered for the best original poetical address to be spoken the opening night. A Mr. Vose of Baltimore was awarded the prize. Attention was called to the fact that a "parquet" was substituted for England's ancient "pit." Some score and a half managers and lessees served the old National until around 1866, when W. W. Rapley took over as owner and later as manager. He was succeeded by his son Harry, and he in turn by the Erlanger interests and finally Marcus Heiman the present owner.



W. W. RAPLEY, PROPRIETOR.



MAURICE EVANS — He maintains the higher traditions of the English-speaking stage; His "Richard II," a masterpiece of his time.



BILLIE BURKE — Sprightly Billie, prototype of Lotta of the gold dust days.

Twice the affairs of the theatre came under the management of a woman; first in 1837, when Miss V. Monier took over the house and played principal roles in her own stock company, and in 1856, when Miss Fanny Morant became lessee and director. She also was an actress of fine talent and business acumen as was her predecessor. It was under the management of Miss Monier that the first of the Booths, the father, Junius Brutus, made his initial Washington appearance in "Richard III." She introduced European and native talent and became a great favorite herself. After a season she gave up the management of the house to go to Europe where she was starred, but returned after a year to again direct the National. Under her second regime she presented both Booth and Forrest in alternate weeks. The house had its second fire soon after Miss Morant became manager, when a performance of "Masks and Faces" was given, with Miss Morant as Peg Woffington. There were no casualties as the performance had finished and the audience had left. For six years only the walls of the old National remained. At this time there was a financial depression and sectional bitterness was in the land with a war in the offing.

The company which was to perform the succeeding night was left stranded with its scenery destroyed, as it had been set up after the close of the previous performance. However the members of the company gave a performance at the Odd Fellows' Hall and the Washingtonians responded most generously to this benefit performance. It was a custom in that era to give a benefit performance to the house managers when they severed their connection with the house. Miss Monier was given a benefit each time she retired and the managers and directors were thus honored over a period of twenty five or thirty years when there was a change in the staff.

If the various administrations under the Presidents Roosevelt, Hoover and Coolidge—Wilson was an inveterate theatre-goer and no doubt Lincoln was a patron of the theatre—seemed lackadaisical



MABEL TALIAFERRO—from childhood the darling of the stage.



BOBBY CLARK—His fun making has made a happier world.



MR. & MRS. HOWARD LINDSEY — Made life worth living with a million fathers.

**to the capital's theatre there has always been a warm spot in the hearts of the rank and file for the town's amusement.**

There must have been a closer link between the public and its theatre in those days than the current times, for the benefits given for these managers show a warmth of appreciation and fraternity by the theatre patron, missing in the modern theatre of New York and the country. Though New York has had its Frohmans, Belascos, Dillinghams, Ziegfelds, they were also producers as well as house managers and were symbolic of the drama itself. There was no one to greet the theatre-goer except the ticket seller whose antagonism to the patron put the latter on the defensive; the theatre-goer rarely came in touch with the house manager, he was a negative of the theatre and usually in hiding, so there was no individuality in the theatre as of an earlier era.

However there has been a sort of halo about the National ever since W. W. Rapley became its owner and manager, and under the regime of his son Harry Rapley, who succeeded him, and finally under the ownership of Marcus Heiman and his business manager, Edmund Plohn. Business managers and actors for the past fifty years, looked forward to an engagement at the National. And prior to its closing, no doubt it was the most popular theatre in the country, with managers, agents, actors and producers. The past eight or ten years it has been in greater demand by the latter because they were usually assured of a capacity business.

Can it be there is a wider breach between the public and the theatre and all it contains by virtue of the mechanicism which is the cornerstone of those amusement mediums, the film and television, which have encroached upon the human denominator really the essence of the spoken drama? Upon the other hand in the days of Booth and Forrest, and the great actors of their era, their lives were cloaked in a mystery and secrecy whereas today the public is introduced to the inner sanctum of their lives and their very thoughts with nothing left to the imagination. Perhaps that is the very thing which has conspired to alienate the public from a theatre no longer fraternal.



GEO. M. COHAN—He gave the theatre everything.



GRANT MITCHELL—One of Nature's noblemen.

Perhaps the film is the guilty party. In its glorification of the glamorous the cinema has infringed upon the sanctum of back stage. In its stride and race for glamour it has exposed to the spot light the gaping crevices and the grit and muck therein which the makeup has failed to hide.

It has overlooked the art of creating the glamorous; it has exposed to the naked eye the modus operandi even, that is the ways and the means of giving some aspect of charm to the shoddy and commonplace.

Whereas something should be left to the imagination. Nothing is more dreary and depressing than a dark, empty stage. Why introduce the public to it? There should be a mysticism in the glamorous. The essence of glamour must come from something unseen, or if seen, clairvoyant. Nakedness never charms; except briefly, almost impereceptibly. Its beauty is in its secrecy.

The old masters knew all this. Their wand was secrecy. The glamour which came to the great actors of other days did not come from the things they were reported to do, but through the things they did not do.

In the era of David Belasco it would have been a sacrilege for an alien to cross the threshold of his stage. Theatric as he was, he kept a mantle over his workshop; showing only enough to pique the curiosity. Minnie Maddern Fiske was ever an enigma; and here was glamour—veiled. She wore a heavy veil whenever she passed through a public hotel lobby. Maud Adams seemed to be a myth — even today. She was rarely if ever exposed to an interviewer.

Perhaps the legitimate theatre caught this policy, as one does the measles, from the bleek, silent picture houses where managers are never seen and never heard. But there has come a change the past few years and some of the fraternal spirit has returned to the front of the house. The public has been quick to observe this and has testified to it.



HELEN HAYES—"As eager as Christmas morning—as dazzling as Christmas night—was on top of the tree last night"—Heywood Broun—New York Tribune—following the premiere of "Dear Brutus" with William Gillette starred, Dec. 23, 1918.



MANTELL - HAMPER—A successful partnership of the nineties.  
"Robert Mantell by right of what he is, and what he does, is the undisputed leader of the stage in America today."—William Winter.



THE LUNTS—in the hearts of their public.



KATHARINE CORNELL—"A great lady who can fill a theatre with warmth and splendor. Makes the theatre again like an honorable art." — Brooks Atkinson, N. Y. Times.

Such men as Lep Solomon, Thomas Brotherton, treasurers of New York theatres, who have given their lives to the business, have merited the thanks of thousands of patrons, and such house managers as Len Hardy, Rex Connor, Frank O'Connor, Carl Fisher, Arthur Lighton and Henry Sorenson, and many others have given efficient and courteous service to the theatregoer. Louis Lotito, managing director of a string of New York houses, and Kermit Bloomgarden, one of the most successful of the younger producers, came from the ranks of the managers and treasurers.

The National has a tradition unrivaled by any other playhouse of the times, unless there be London houses which by reason of their seniority, may challenge this tall talk. There can be no tradition without maturity, but that is no argument that the archaic or pre-Raphaelite with their eob webs, may boast a master-piecee any more than neoterism with its gloss and shoddy. Any innovation can have none of the virtues of the traditional until it becomes of age. If one were to slip into the dark National at this time and find himself a seat down front, he could easily figure out in his own mind the real meaning of tradition; it is something which comes with time which is mellowed, not in stone or marble, which may be only a receptacle, a something in which the human element is transcendent. Thus one may not sit long in the deserted National before there come before his mind's eye great actors of the past—"in the flesh" as they knew nothing of the films and would not understand this term—scores of the finest artists of their era. First would come perhaps Junius Brutus Booth, that short, spare, muscular man, with head and face of great beauty, pale, but with a healthy pallor. One might hear his magnificent voice like a blast of a bugle or as sweet as a flute. He might appear as Hamlet or Iago or Richard III. Then may come his sons in classic roles, Edwin and the ill-starred John Wilkes. One may recall accounts of Edwin's appearance after his illustrious father. It was before a skeptical audience, but comparisons, if odious in this case proved bene-



ROBERT PITKIN



FLORENZ AMES



RUTH CUMMING



KATHLEEN ROCHE

---

## WHEN THE SAVOYARDS CAME TO THE NATIONAL quote:

"'Pinafore' was music that the public could understand; the music sparkled, laughed and flashed. It was the opera by the people, for the people, of the people and they claimed it and adopted 'Pinafore' as theirs. It knew no section; one touch of melody makes the whole world akin, and it was the one opera where all met on equal ground."

These lines were written 71 years ago, following the opening of the Gilbert and Sullivan "Pinafore." It was the night of April 16, 1879, that this opera was given its premiere in Washington, and to again quote the same writer: "The City went wild over a new opera of Gilbert and Sullivan; it was the immortal 'Pinafore'."

Down the years the Washingtonians have always given these G. and S. operas a warm welcome. There is no record of the many times they have been presented at the National. During the years of World War II a repertoire of these operas under the management of the Shuberts and direction of R. H. Burnside, were given at the National season after season to capacity business. Pictures of four of a company are shown on the opposite page.

---

ficial and he became a favorite of Washingtonians. John Wilkes Booth may appear in the role of Richard III. Any one may look up the date of his first and only performance at the National: it was Saturday, April 11, 1863, and President Lincoln occupied a box with Senator Oliver Morton.

Lincoln may also appear before one as he sits in this deserted house or President Polk or Buchanan. One may recall the last play of the season 1865 at the National; it was "Mazeppa" and Kate Vance with her educated horse Don Juan. Not important are they and they might not come to mind except that the records show President Lincoln had been offered a box for this engagement and debated whether to attend the performance or go to Ford's the evening of his assassination. Fate plays strange tricks. All theatres were closed indefinitely following this calamity.

Few play bills may have the interest of the J. Wilkes Booth bill issued for his first performance in Washington when President Lincoln occupied the box. After considerable research about the only one in existence was found. Copy of it is appended.



GERTRUDE LAWRENCE—Has few peers on two continents.



CORNELIA OTIS SKINNER—Her one-woman show won her fame.

## NATIONAL THEATRE

Leonard Grover, Sole Lessee & Manager

*First Appearance of the  
Distinguished Young Actor*

### J. WILKES BOOTH

In His Celebrated Character of the  
Duke of Gloster

Afterward, Richard III; or  
"The Battle of Bosworth Field"

*Richard III* ..... J. Wilkes Booth  
*Richmond* ..... E. H. Brink  
*King Henry* ..... William Bailey  
*Buckingham* ..... S. K. Chester  
*Norfolk* ..... C. Williams  
*Prince of Wales* ..... Mrs. Edwards  
*Duke of York* ..... Miss Susie Parker  
*Stanley* ..... Mr. Stevens  
*Catesby* ..... J. Edwards  
*Lord Mayor* ..... J. Parker  
*Ratcliffe* ..... W. Barron  
*Oxford* ..... Mr. Acker  
*Blunt* ..... Mr. Kilbourn  
*Lieut. of Tower* ..... H. Wybroy  
*Tirrell* ..... Mr. Hillyard  
*Queen Elizabeth* ..... Miss Alice Grev  
*Lady Ann* ..... Miss Effie Germon  
*Duchess of York* ..... Mrs. Muzzy



JOHN WILKES BOOTH — ill-starred member of the great disciples of Thespis.

If the members of this cast could appear before one and could speak, what a story they might unfold. Were they fine actors? Was it a well balanced cast? Had they weighed J. Wilkes Booth in the balance and found him wanting? How would they compare with a cast selected today for this tragedy? Would they savor of the old school? It will be noted that the full names of six of this cast are not printed on the programme. Introduced thus today these actors could complain to the Actors Equity Association and the management would be instructed to print their names in full.



FRANK FAY—Two famous actors.

If one has patience and lingers a little longer in the mute National the members of the cast of "The Man of the World," which was the opening bill of the National, Dec. 7, 1835, may break through a long cast but no "names" and introduced merely as Miss or Mr. or Mrs. Then will come J. H. Hackett, Edwin Forrest, Madame Celeste, Fanny Ellsler, Julia Dean, Charlotte Cushman, Emma Fitzpatrick, Agnes Robertson, Matilda Heron, John Owens, J. W. Wallack and E. L. Davenport, all fine artists, but they do not stay long. It will be recalled that Joe Jefferson came along in these times and played "An Affair of the Heart," and when Charlotte Cushman gave her farewell performance as Ophelia the Washington Light Infantry and the Washington Continental Guards attended the performance and the queenly Charlotte as a gracious recognition of this compliment gave them one and all a wine supper after the performance.

And these great people continue to come; there's Maggie Mitchell and Parodi and Annie Louise Kellogg, Lucille Western; then there's Madame Ponisi, who had been the Marquise de Pompadour in "Narcisse," and Avonia Jones, who at her farewell benefit played Juliet to J. Wilkes Booth's Romeo. William H. Crane may come upon the scene and Mr. and Mrs. Barney Williams and Mr. and Mrs. Charles Keen and Lotta and the great Ristori. And still they come, Mrs. Scott Siddons, Marie Seebach, Dion Boucicault, Christine Nilsson, Madame Janauschek, Mlle. Aimee, E. H. Sothern, Salvini, Adelaide Neilson, Clara Morris, Lawrence Barrett, Mary Anderson, Stuart Robson, Kate Claxton and Madame Modjeska.

These are but names today, perhaps even not names to the new generation. There can be no word-of-mouth to sing the praise of Maggie Mitchell. Only a printed page can tell of her conquests of the country and of Washington audiences in particular. Upon her second visit to the capital, in 1866, she remained three weeks and gave a repertoire of three plays, namely "Fauchon," "Cricket" and "Little Barefoot." It was still in the '60's that Joe Jefferson came in



EDDIE CANTOR—His eyes as big as his heart.



DENNIS KING—Operatic-Dramatic stalwart — His Francois Villon in "The Vagabond King," produced by Russell Janney, enriched the stage with its romanticism.

**"Rip Van Winkle."** He was not a new-comer to the old theatre as he had served there as manager, stage manager, treasurer and door-keeper. He knew his theatre, as did Madame Adelaide Ristori: she, too, gave a repertoire. What a contrast to Maggie Mitchell's comedies! Tragedy was her forte: she played the name parts in "Medea," "Mary Queen of Scots," "Queen Elizabeth" and "Marie Antoinette." She was proclaimed the greatest living actress of her day.

Just what did those great artists have which the modern thespian lacks? Or did they lack qualities which belong to the actor of the new school? Ristori is described as of fine physique and noble carriage with a wonderful facial expression and was superb in poses and pantomime. It is likely more stress would be laid on pauses in these times than upon poses and pantomime, and a fine physique for a fine actress might be questionable: neither Helen Hayes nor Judith Anderson is endowed with it. How did the latter's "Medea," which she gave in 1947, compare with the Ristori interpretation of this tragic role of seventy five years ago? Poses and pantomime might well be discounted. Probably both artists had a great emotional reserve which they were able to tap at will. But there can be no comparison of the two. If comparison has its virtues on occasion, it loses all potency with time or its passing. The actor is entirely dependent upon externals: it was Ristori's audiences that proclaimed her greatness. Of what quality were these of seventy five years ago? Perhaps poses and pantomime showed in their eyes qualities and greatness. By the same token perhaps the modern audience would turn thumbs down and Ristori would be a flop.

However the conquests of these artists must be treasured and may not be winked at. So the fact remains that great stars visited the National over a period of a hundred years. Many women: indeed they outnumbered the men. There is a list of forty or fifty actresses of note. That is startling when there is a mere handfull of less than ten today. But the engagements of these women to the



FAY TEMPLETON—A generous spirit with a keen sense of humor.



FAY TEMPLETON—in a juvenile "Pinafore" company at the age of ten.

National covered a long period. The modern stage of the past fifty or sixty years also had its luminaries, but were they given the applause and encomiums which were given to their predecessors? Schools of acting have changed. Also the approach to the theatre. Actors Equity has a list of 6000 members whereas there cannot be work for more than 1500 at a time. Fledglings and talentless youngsters with but meagre experience in a rural theatre are given cards to admit them to the back stage door of a theatre. Few of these may know that Madame Mars was the "Louise de Liquorelles" yet before the curtain of the Theatre Francais rose she had sixty-eight rehearsals. Fanny Kemble wore a court costume and train in her house for a year so as to get accustomed to it. Ristori studied the part of "Marie Antoinette" three years before she attempted to enact it. The great Rachel retired to her country seat and remained there three months alone to study the last act of "Adrienne Lecouvreur." Were they great? Perhaps comparisons are unnecessary. While history may give a halo to these histrionies, still their names must be emblazoned on the niches of posthumous fame. They came and went to the National. It was like coming back home to them as many played repeat performances there down the years. They gave no heed to racial discrimination or segregation. If they gave it any thought at all they believed the subject came under the province of the management.

Emma Abbott may appear while one sits in the National followed by Denman Thompson, Adah Richmond, Mr. & Mrs. John W. Albaugh, and McKee Rankin, and Ada Cavendish, and the immortal Sarah Bernhardt, James O'Neill, Henry Irving and Ellen Terry, Mlle. Rhea. If one lingers long enough he may see the Barrymore family, Maurice, John, Ethel and Lionel; and John Drew, Minnie Maddern Fiske, William Collier, Maude Adams, Henry Miller, George Arliss, Jean Eagels, Graut Mitchell, Billie Burke, Julia Marlowe, E. H. Sothern, Virginia Harned, Dennis King, Helen Gahagan, Peggy Wood, and Frank Bacon. This is only an abridged list of the

## MEMORABILIA

As "A Great Curtain Falls" was going to press two men of the theatre died within a very short time of each other. They were Brock Pemberton and Arthur Hopkins. They were linked in a way with the National Theatre as their attractions visited the capital city for over a generation under the booking regime of the Shuberts and Marcus Heinman. Ethel, Lionel, John Barrymore, and other great stars, came to Washington under the direction of Mr. Hopkins. In 1948 Mr. Pemberton introduced Frank Fay in "Harvey" at the National; he was the last star to appear there and holds a record for a long run of seven weeks at that house.

Both men were renitent to Equity's anti-segregation policy, both men had faith in the commercial theatre, and both men were less money conscious, though they had many disappointments, than some non-profit groups.

The passing of these was a great shock to the theatre community, their friends and families. However these men had lived full lives, realized the usufruct of their efforts, though they never reached an ultimate satisfaction, and exigencies did not come in "single file," what matter whether they were to pass from the Broadway scene today or tomorrow. The end is inevitable.

The loss is not the loss to these friends. Memory will give them a sort of dividend. The loss is to the living theatre. The tragedy is the indisputable fact that there is no one to fill the chairs made vacant by their exit; only time will show whether the newcomers may have some of their predecessors' qualities.

It may not be gainsaid that these men enriched an impoverished theatre. They brought dignity and a fine taste to the stage. These were a natural heritage; they were not acquired, and it is likely these qualities would have been an asset had they engaged in any other enterprise. They also had rugged individualism; also something handed down to them.

So here we have in these great showmen the great triumvirate; dignity, fine taste, individualism. Slowly this individualism is being usurped. The economic factor is largely to blame. Angels, who feared to tread heretofore, have reared their heads in show business, with alien advice and dictatorship, and the U. S. Government would break into bits the Shubert organization, than which there would be no show business.

One must give credit to these two men for their showmanship; though it is said a showman is born. Yet show business is an empirical business; a touchstone will not get one far. Experience was their teacher, but they came to the theatre with attributes which leavened their showmanship, and they were stage struck. They could have been born with this, too. There is a parallelism in their lives; perhaps it is just that, in love with the stage and all it circumscribes. To sum up they were alike in integrity and honesty, in a tenacity of purpose, in quietism and taciturnity; these last may be significant of a lack of a sense of humor. But they were observed to laugh inwardly and with their eyes so it is likely they did not miss the funny side of life.

**great actors who have played the National.** Not always in successes, but there were few failures, and many bills were repeated and the stars returned from season to season. They were on firm ground among friends in Washington. The man in the street really supported the theatre. Moderate prices made theatre-going a necessity, not a luxury as today.

But the sale of the gallery seats alone will not support a play-house. If the great government of the United States has not built a nationalized playhouse in Washington, it would be folly to state that the official family, executive, administrative and so forth, ignored it and failed to recognize its place in the sun. There have been Command Performances at the White House; President Lincoln entertained Maggie Mitchell there at a dinner given in her honor, President Grant and General Sherman were habitual theatre-goers and even President Coolidge entertained John Barrymore and his manager Arthur Hopkins when the former was playing "Hamlet" in the city. The interview must have been brief as Hopkins is noted for his obnubescence and Coolidge was famous for his taciturnity. The evening following the session of this triumvirate Mr Coolidge occupied a box with Mrs. Coolidge and party at the performance of Barrymore in "Hamlet" and during one of the big scenes pulled out a large watch, looked at the time and yawned. This gesture may have epitomized the state of the union under his administration and his attitude toward the theatre. But the pattern of administrations changes from time to time and its mood and temper and habits have been reflected in the audiences of the old National. President Wilson was never conspicuous by his presence, being a constant theatre-goer, but the presence of Coolidge made him a conspicuous figure, and he would steal the show. As he was the center of attraction whether he yawned or not, the actor, as with a tuning fork, could sound the presence of either. A fine performance was always given for Wilson.

**It has been a varied fare the National has offered over a period**

of 113 years and down to the six weeks before it closed when performances were given of "Harvey" and "Oklahoma," as different in entertainment qualities as were its many historic performances, running the gamut from minstrelsy to slight of hand and opera bonffe to the classics. Shakespeare seemed to be the vogue for a full century and over. "Hamlet," "Othello" and "Richard III." were frequently on the boards. "Macbeth," "Romeo and Juliet" and "The Merchant of Venice" were perennials, and "Comedy of Errors," "Henry IV" and "Henry V," "Taming of the Shrew," "As You Like It," "Cymbeline" and "Julius Caesar" were frequent visitors mixing tragedy with comedy. But the old audiencees were never ashamed to shed a tear and never afraid of a tear. "Camille," "East Lynne," "The Two Orphans" and "Little Nell" and "The Marchioness" were old loves. But sentimental "Uncle Tom's Cabin," which toured the country for thirty years or more, made but two visits to the national capital, being taboo thereafter. However a play patterned to please the southern audience called "Uncle Tom As He Is" or "True Southern Life" had a hearing once or twice. There were "Damon & Pythias," "Tongueless Pilot Boy," "Hunchbaek," "London Assurance," "An Affair of Honor." The latter was given with the following distinguished cast: Henry Placide, James E. Murdoch, J. W. Wallack Jr., A. H. Davenport, Joe Jefferson, J. M. Davidson, Edwin Adams, Lizzie Weston, and Kate Howe.

"Richelieu" seemed always present; then there were "Lady of Lyons" and "Caleb Plummer," "Our Female American Cousin," "The Cricket on the Hearth," "Rip Van Winkle," "Under Two Flags," "Mary Stuart" and "Adrienne Lecouvreur," "Old Curiosity Shop," "David Crockett," "Lord Dundreary," "Enoch Arden," "Ingomar," "Mighty Dollar," "Evadne," "Shangraun" and "Sardanapalus," "Our Boarding House," "Musette," "David Garrick," "Frou Frou," "Francesca da Rimini," "Monte Cristo," "The Private Secretary," "Fedora" and "Lady Ashley" ad finitum.

A hundred years ago old friends wore well in Washington. There was a loyalty for the classics and an affection for the favorite players who appeared regularly season after season. The Shakespeare plays were repeated by these, and such outstanding artists as Maggie Mitchell and Joe Jefferson, whose names were household words, came with the snows in their time-worn repertories, the latter finally confining himself to "Rip Van Winkle." Maggie Mitchell appeared in Washington the seasons of 1856, '66, '67, '70, '72, '82 and '83, and though there seems to be no record of the year she was entertained at the White House by President Lincoln, it is believed it was just a short time before he was assassinated at Ford's Theatre. Kate Claxton, Mary Anderson, Fanny Davenport and John McCullough were also annual visitors to the capital.

That loyalty to play and player seems to have gone entirely out of fashion, though the English of England, whence the spirit came, perhaps, seem to remain steadfast to its loves of the theatre. It is doubtful if Frank Fay can return to New York in "Harvey" and few attractions can tour these times year after year and expect a welcome from old friends. The exceptions may be "Blossom Time," "The Student Prince" and the Gilbert and Sullivan operas.

However these stars and their vehicles could not keep the National open a full season so the management had to be on the qui vive for other entertainments. So interspersed down the seasons were minstrel shows, legerdemain, musicals of all sorts, including opera bouffe, light opera, comic opera and grand opera, burlesque, vaudeville and extravaganza. There were trained animal shows and twice, the first time in 1844, the theatre was transformed into a circus, the pit and stage affording an amphitheatre for the clowns and trained horses and dogs. An English opera company came to give "The Daughter of the Regiment" and there were grand opera performances, their repertoire including "Martha," "Il Trovatore," and the great Parodi came in "La Semiramide," "Don Giovanni" and others. And about this era came "The Black Crook" to set the

**town agog; then Italian and French operas sung by companies from these countries, and Gilbert and Sullivan became the rage, "Pinafore" by regular Savoyards and "gentlemen and ladies of color" and natives of Japan.**

**How important was the box office and the man behind the window in those days? There were no cut rates, nor two-for-ones, so there was no quene waiting for a lower price with raising of the curtain, though there were premiums on tickets for popular attractions. The seating arrangement changed from time to time, but the standard price was \$1 top and 25 cents for the gallery. Private boxes sold as high as ten dollars but seats in the parquet and dress circle were 75 cents and sometimes \$1.00, second gallery 25 cents, colored gallery 25 cents and the pit 50 cents. The theatre-goer could buy a good seat for the price of the tax on an orchestra seat today. But in those days eggs were 10 cents a dozen, butter 8 cents a pound and bacon 12 cents, and liver was given to the house-wife to take home to the cat. There were no Unions, there being 17 in the theatre today according to Bill Brady. Members of the various departments of a theatre or company were paid according to their merits. Members of most departments today are paid more than the actor. His minimum seems to be the least paid. However that wizard of the world of Make-Believe, R. H. Burnside, for many years director of the old Hippodrome, summed the subject up succinctly when he exclaimed: "Give the actor a rope . . . and he will suspend it over Niagara Falls and walk across it . . . even though he will have to walk back."**

**The exception to the popular prices was the advanced rate for seats to the first appearance of Jenny Lind, the Swedish soprano, who seemed the first lady of the land when Washington was not so old. The prices were \$7 for secured seats close to the stage, middle of hall \$5 and back \$4. And the concert was given in a hastily constructed hall upon ruins of the old National which had burned to the ground. The public was advised that only home labor was**

used for building the hall. Evidently there was no other place suitable for the concert. But the nightingale was eclipsed some years later when that team of Grisi and Mario, soprano and tenor, came to town. The opera was "Norma" and the patrons paid \$75 for the lower boxes, \$50 for upper boxes, orchestra seats \$10, parquet \$7.50 and balcony and peanut gallery \$5. A miner from California paid \$1000 for a box. He bought it from a Congressman who probably added a tax on this price. No doubt Gialita Grisi was the finest dramatic singer of her day. She was called "The Diva." The tenor Mario was panegyrized in Owen Meredith's verse in "Aux Italiens":

*Of all the operas that Verdi wrote,  
The best to my taste is "Trovatore,"  
And Mario can soothe with a tender note  
The souls in Purgatory.  
The moon in the tower slept soft and low  
And who has not thrilled in the strangest way  
As we heard him sing, while the gas burned low  
"non il acordar di me."*

Ill luck has followed the National down the years. But ill luck is always at the heels of great showmen. A "roof" may suffer by virtue of its location though that is a moot question and some will say 'The play's the thing' and the public will find the house's location. However the National has had its failures, its money troubles, its national calamities, and wars and rumors of wars and four great fires when the structure was burned completely to the ground. A striking coincidence is the fact that each time the theatre was destroyed by fire, or a short time previously, there was an inauguration of a president, namely: Polk, Buchanan, Grant and Cleveland in the years 1845, 1857, 1873, and 1885. Thus these fires came at the busiest time of the year when the installation of a new president brought thousands of visitors to town. In the first fire the owner, W. W. Rapley, was insured for only \$40,000 and thus took a loss of \$98,000, as the structure cost him \$138,000 to build.

**Undamned by the heavy loss he rebuilt the house, and it was again opened Dec. 1, 1873, eight months after the fire which was Jan. 28, 1873.**

The National Theatre is unique by reason of the historical fact that a theatre has stood upon its present site all these years, with the property never at any time being used for purposes other than for structures of amusement of the legitimate class, and that these have borne the name National Theatre, though in age perhaps Philadelphia's Walnut Street Theatre may predate the National by a few years. There were times, and periods of long years, and depression when only the bare walls occupied the site, but eventually they were removed and a new theatre arose. The house was originally christened the National, a name which should suggest a place of amusement for all U. S. citizens, and not only a playhouse for native Washingtonians. During the first fire, March 5, 1845, a nondescript bill, called "Beauty and the Beast" and "Stage Struck Nigger" were occupying the theatre; the fire of Jan. 29, 1856, the house was playing "Self" and "A Kiss in the Dark," with John Owens and Melinda Jones featured; came the third fire of Jan. 28, 1873, with Alice Oates in her Comic Bonffe Company the occupant; Wallack's New York Company was appearing at the theatre in "Victor Durant," when it was consumed by fire the fourth time, Feb. 27, 1885. It was rebuilt and opened Oct. 5, 1885, with Rhea in "Lady Ashley."

With its calamitous fires and adversities, for fortune seemed to frown upon the National from its conception and birth, it never had a casualty. With the untoward and ruinous fires no lives were lost. The fires always occurred after the performances, and when the audience had left the theatre. Though an inebriate who went to sleep during a performance of "Sharps and Flats," with Robson and Crane, and was locked in the theatre after the play, fell headlong from the fourth tier to the pit when looking for an exit. He was unhurt and unscratched, though he smashed four of the orchestra seats.

estra seats by his fall. He returned to the theatre the next morning for his hat. Nor was there a casualty when during a fight in the gallery, someone shouted fire, for a panic was averted by the coolness of the ushers and a jovial air played by the orchestra. It was during a performance of Kate Claxton in "The Two Orphans." Fire was always pursuing the bonnie Kate, whether in theatre, hotel, church or tavern, and the publicity given to this probably was the primary cause of the near panic.

The reason why the National is so popular to the profession is the fact that the greatest artists have trod its boards; and it is popular with Washingtonians and all American citizens because it is the link to the dramatic past. It has great charm because of its traditions. There is no great actor of the modern era whose name is not inseparably connected with the National. The old place must be immortal. It must have a soul. It may not be the same boards, the same stage, the same house even, where Forrest, Cushman, Booth, Rhea, kings and queens of the divine art did their bits, but the spot is the same and neither fire nor water can obliterate it. It is historic ground, sacred to Thalia, Terpsichore and Melpomene.

With the opening of the National after its fourth and last fire, an Old Timer wrote the following lines which seem to have an appropriate sentiment today:

The stage is just inside the charmed portals whose key is talent, genius and labor. In no other profession in life is recompense and acquital so liberal as the dramatic art gives to its votaries. The demand for good actors far exceeds the supply and millions of people are ready to welcome the true artist. The dramatic instinct is inherent in man. Now that the higher civilization recognizes the actor, the peer of the finest, and the art of portraying the passions of humanity the most refined, so it is the wish that those gifted with the histrionic traits may find fame and fortune and happiness. In the coming theatre, whose curtain is rolled up tonight for the first time (following the fourth fire with Rhea in "Lady

Ashley") what a story now in the womb of time is before it. On these boards who is destined to play before men . . .

From the lowest note to the top of the compass. Perhaps a super—soubrette—who knows? Like Kean he may now sleep on a door-step for lack of wherewithal to pay his lodging. Like Neilson she may be wandering about the streets crying with hunger. And the new National will be the spot where her transcendent genius will blaze out in all its dazzling splendor.

*Here comes all unknown the girl,  
To incarnate the muse,  
To wear the mantle Rachel left,  
And walk in Siddons' shoes.*



## TEMPORA MUTANTUR ET NOS MUTAMUR IN IIS!

The theatre has come a long way from the Greek and Roman world famous places of amusement and recreation to the sheds—usually painted red—of English and American Colonial days of the Sixteenth Century. The location of even the street Kip, in which the first New York theatre was built, is not clearly recorded, and Ford's theatre in Washington, which is known by every school child, operated as a playhouse for only a short time. The New York theatres after only fifty or sixty years of service, have become antiquated and will likely be only a memory in the 21st century. The wonder grows that the Washington's **National** has survived all of a hundred and thirteen years, and it seems a pity that after weathering the storms of a century and more that the actor himself should be so provincial, so short sighted, as to refuse to appear at that house. But the theatre is vulnerable. It is like the heel of Achilles.

But adversity has always pursued the theatre, just as the fires pursued Bonnie Kake Claxton. The Roman emperor Theodosius the youngeer, published laws forbidding shows at Christmas, Easter and Pentecost, and the fathers denounced plays in the severest terms, Tertullian animadvertising on the evil and profanity of the theatre. But the spirit of mimicry was not suppressed, it manifested itself in palaces, feudal castles, abbeys and cathedrals, and in the public thoroughfares, as in Georgetown with the strolling players, in adapting itself to the vicissitudes of time and custom, refinement or barbarism. From the very dawn of civilization, dramatic genius, in some shape or other, has been continually reproduced.

Somehow it gets through. Perhaps the theatre is lucky. Perhaps, as ambiguous as it may seem, the theatre never grows old after all. Perhaps in its eternal youth it has learned to tell the chaff from the wheat. In its wisdom it has learned that the great virtue in life is in giving. If the theatre never grows old, its old Stagers never grow old. They have the spirit of youth and the wisdom of age. As a matter of fact, old people never grow old. It is only youth that grows old. What is meant is that the theatre has

the shortsightedness and the impetuosity of youth and the wisdom of age. Youth begins to grow old when it makes its first mistake; from the time when the child touches the hot stove it begins to grow old. There is no medium which makes more mistakes and failures than the theatre, but in its wisdom it takes these in its stride. Youth does not.

And unlike other vocations and professions men and women grow young in the theatre. They step from juvenile or ingenue to character in a night. Then too their training is of the essence of justice and right; they have been taught to know by the prophesy of the Witches that Macbeth will meet his just retribution.

Indeed no art force, in a perpetual creative mood as it is, grows old; poetry, music, drama, sculpture, painting, architecture. Particularly the theatre (drama), the latter by virtue of its ultimate end of imitating man in his own image or woman in her own image. These arts, handmaidens of freedom and peace, must save the world from utter destruction. Simply the drama must continue to do its bit as it has always done it; not by propaganda, but by an analysis of love and hate. Teaching the art of living.

More than ever the arts must serve their purpose—they have always had a strong competitor in War; but science and many of its panaceas—War—grow old. Overnight. Machinery of combat, the foster child of science, is dated by the next full moon. The science of war is eternally old. Like Father Time. And, the Lords of War, disciples of Mars, everlasting create God in man's image.

GEORGE ATKINSON







Date Due

3-51  
Withdrawn from UF. Surveyed to Internet Archive

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA



3 1262 07803 496 3

792.0973  
A 2 754X

